

The Spirit's Effect!

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:16-26

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Bethany Church

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Some years ago, my oldest children joined me for a daylong canoe trip on the St. Croix River. (Diane took baby Joseph elsewhere.) When my children dragged themselves out of the river, exhausted and burnt to a crisp, they thought they had paddled on the wrong side of the gates of hell. They spent the last hour of the trip floating in the water next to the canoes, trying to get cool. That trip is indelible in our memories, and its stories and laughter multiply. Relationships develop as we share common experiences, even traumatic ones.

God has us together sharing victories, disappointments, hardships and blessings. It is not an accident that you and I are here together. We are meant to share these challenges and triumphs by *living in the Spirit*. That's why we asked Paul's question, "*Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?*" Life is not about what we do or believe. It is about what God does through his Spirit as we act. That's why we discussed the need to *be born again*. We, the human family, are the living dead, dead in spirit and therefore struggling in our relationships with God and dying in our bodies. Each of us must be *born again*, born of the spirit, to relate and live as God's children. Whether we locate this second birth with infant baptism, or some decision and prayer of ours, our souls, once swept clean for Jesus, may have become full of idols and need to be cleansed by the blood of Christ and filled with the Spirit of God, so that we cry to God in our inmost being "Abba Father." That is also why we need to be *baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire*. We are to be anointed with the Spirit, indeed, clothed with power from on high, dressed for

the redemption of this world. The Spirit is our “power suit” that helps us confront some of the fears and doubts of our community brought on by movies and books like the *Da Vinci Code*. Despite excellent historical arguments for the Jesus of the gospels, no pagan would leave their idols, no Monotheistic Jew would worship Jesus unless something more than arguments convinced him or her that Jesus is God. Nothing substitutes for the demonstration of God’s power through his Spirit. That is why it is critical that we see the Holy Spirit who is showing himself at every turn. The Holy Spirit empowers both the obedient and disobedient to do things for the common good. We are influenced by spirit at all times. We are led to the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit and misled by unholy spirits. The real Holy Spirit counsels and empowers you to live as Jesus lived – close to the Father. Are you tuned in? Do you see?

Today I began telling about a canoe trip that cements some of our relationships as a family. Obviously, more than a canoe trip must hold us together; but the harsh elements we were ill-prepared to face were soil for something that truly bonds us, the Spirit of God. The effect of God’s Spirit is recorded with these words:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23, NIV)

If the Holy Spirit had not been at work, the trials of the trip might have spawned fits of rage, discord, dissension and factions. Some of you have seen that at work in your families. Little things blow up and lead to isolation and loneliness. A friend of mine had to be medicated and was often hospitalized during holidays because she was haunted by the intense pain she experienced early in her family life. The fourth of July is a holiday that may hold awkward and uncomfortable situations for some families who gather. The fruit of the Spirit can make a difference. Although the fruit of the Spirit is very personal, it is relational. Seven aspects of this fruit, love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness have no meaning outside

of relationships. What does it mean to love if you relate to no one? What is peace if you are isolated? What is patience or kindness if it is not directed to someone other than yourself? To whom are you good, to whom are you faithful, to whom are you gentle?

God leads us into relationships. The Great Commandment is relational. All the law of God hinges upon the fulfillment of the command to love God with all our heart, soul and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The effect of the Spirit is to produce in you and me the desire and ability to do exactly that. God's Spirit authors loving, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful and gentle attitudes in our hearts and actions in our relationships. Moreover, the Spirit fills our hearts with joy so that we are positive, fun-loving people. He also produces in us passion for self-control so that we master our bodies and actions rather than live as slaves.

If this is the effect of the Spirit, then how come so many of us suffer painful relationships and destructive habits? Do you remember the story of Lazarus? He was dead four days. The Jewish burial custom was to wash and straighten the body, and tightly wrap it in foot-wide strips of linen from the armpits to the ankles. People often would treat the bands of cloths with a gummy substance made from spices, myrrh and aloes. It would help the cloth strips adhere to one another and to the body of the deceased. Nicodemus used 75 pounds of spice in Jesus' burial. Imagine Lazarus tightly wound in spicy, sticky grave clothes with a napkin over his head. Jesus approaches the cave or tomb, and in John 11 we read:

Then Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus came out, bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!" (John 11:43-44, NLT)

Although the English word "unwrap" is understandable, the Greek word means to loose. With Lazarus stuck in grave clothes, he needed to be loosed. Jesus gave Lazarus life; but Jesus commanded his followers to loose him. Imagine Lazarus trying walk with grave clothes.

Imagine the exhaustion he would suffer if he continued in this bondage. Even though alive because of Jesus, he would suffer without help. He would function terribly because his past clung to him. Why didn't Jesus go over to Lazarus and help him out of the grave clothes? Why did he command the others to help him? Why did John even write about this command and why was it preserved for you and me to read and hear? Was it not given and preserved so that we would help each other remove our grave clothes?

In the book of James, the Bible teaches that we are to confess our sins to one another and pray for another that we will be healed. The Spirit of God works through people. With people we experience love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. The Spirit produces this in us as he leads us in our journey together. It is when we isolate ourselves and hide our faults in shame that we languish and give out under the burden of those grave clothes. They may stick to us, but they no longer belong on us. God brings his priests, other believers, to us for our healing.

What wounds do you carry? What depresses you? Paul writes in Ephesians 5 that we can be continually filled with the Spirit. He points to three things we do in Christian community that assures the work of the Spirit. One is speak to one another or fellowship. Another is to sing or worship together. Third is to submit to one another or receive the ministry of each other. I encourage you today that the grave clothes are to come off. Christ came that you might live and live to the full. The fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace and these other wonderful traits that are true of Jesus. They will become true of you if you choose to follow the counsel of the Holy Spirit.